

WORLD'S TOP YOUNG FOOTBALL PLAYERS IN U.S. FOR WORLD CUP PROGRAM

**By
Tim Receveur
Washington File Staff Writer**

WASHINGTON, JUNE 13-- When the 2006 World Cup kicked off in Germany on June 9, 32 football teams from six continents joined together to share in one of the greatest international experiences in the world's most popular sporting event.

A microcosm of the World Cup also began in the United States on June 11 when 30 secondary-school football stars from 13 countries gathered outside Washington to launch the World Cup Sports Initiative.

The initiative, a partnership between the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the U.S. Soccer Foundation, U.S. Soccer Federation, and Major League Soccer (MLS), will show the players how the game of football is structured and played in the United States (where the sport is known as soccer), including the important roles of women as players, referees and coaches at all levels.

At a welcome dinner at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia, the athletes gathered to start officially their visit in the United States and to receive their football uniforms and gear for their new teams.

The boys and girls, ages 13-18, represent Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bolivia, China, Indonesia, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa, Uganda and Uzbekistan.

One of the athletes, Tumwesigye Henry, from Kampala, Uganda, is making his first trip to the United States. The trip also marks the first time he has ever flown on an airplane.

"It was a very long trip and I was very tired, but not now. Everything is very exciting and I can't wait to get started," said Henry during an interview with the Washington File.

The program will take the athletes from Washington to New York and finally to Germany to watch a World Cup match between the United States and Ghana on June 22.

Henry said his family in Uganda, including his five brothers and sisters, are extremely proud of his football skills as a striker on the MUT Uganda football team in Kampala and of his selection to participate in the World Cup Sports Initiative.

Managed and implemented by the Delphi International Program of World Learning, the World Cup Sports Initiative works at the grassroots level to help young players discover how success in athletics -- with an emphasis on teamwork, respect, leadership, and conflict resolution -- can translate into the development of life skills and academic achievement.

The athletes are scheduled to attend a clinic hosted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Men's Champion University of Maryland, to be special guests at a D.C. United practice, and to watch a Red Bulls game in New York. D.C. United and the Red Bulls are professional football teams in U.S. Major League Soccer.

The program reflects the theme of this year's FIFA (Federation International Football Association) World Cup, "a time to make friends," with an emphasis on building international understanding and respect between young people around the world.

"At first I couldn't believe it, but I am finally in the U.S. and I am so excited about everything that we are going to do," said Henry.

Germany is hosting the 2006 World Cup from June 9 to July 9.

For more information, see World Cup 2006 (http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/life_and_culture/sports/world_cup.html) and the related article, "United States Set for Start of 2006 World Cup of Football (<http://usinfo.state.gov/eur/Archive/2006/Jun/08-861494.html>)."

For more information on athletics in the United States, see Sports (http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/life_and_culture/sports.html).

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